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A View to a Mountain

UMass Amherst Center Economic Development

A View To A Mountain

Easthampton Wires Project

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EASTHAMPTON WIRES PROJECT

I. Purpose

The purpose of this project is to examine the feasibility of submerging the overhead utilities that run along the downtown streets, Main, Union, and Cottage, in the City of Easthampton. To achieve this purpose, our team investigated the steps involved with submerging utilities and how the City of Easthampton might go through this process. This reports details the research of the utilities, the effects of the move, and its possible consequences.

II. Profile of Easthampton

The City of Easthampton, situated at the base of Mount Tom, occupies a beautiful location in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts (Figure 1. Easthampton in Massachusetts - Appendix B). Beginning as an agrarian community, Easthampton became a vital and important center of industrial manufacturing. Numerous mills operated within it using the power of the Manhan River and Nashawannuck Pond to produce goods ranging from textiles to vulcanized rubber.

Presently, Easthampton is home to over 15,000 residents and encompasses an area of 13.6 square miles (Figure 2. Easthampton - Appendix B). The city is committed to maintaining its manufacturing base and is assisted in this by its proximity to Route 10, route 141, and Interstate 91 transportation corridors. In addition to manufacturing, the City of Easthampton desires to maintain a residential community that has as an asset, a strong defined downtown. Downtown Easthampton has a unique character because of its history and natural assets. Many of the downtown buildings date back to the late nineteenth century and are reminders of the evolution of Easthampton. From the downtown, Mount Tom provides a magnificent background and can be seen from many vantage points while walking on Main, Union, and Cottage Streets. To complement this backdrop, Easthampton has Nashawannuck Pond, a 30-acre pond that is located in the middle of their downtown. It adds beauty to the downtown and offers many recreational opportunities.

III. Project Area

The study area for Easthampton's utility proposal is the downtown section of Easthampton, Massachusetts (Figure 3. Easthampton Downtown Area – Appendix B). The downtown consists of the main business district of the city located along Main, Union, and Cottage Streets.

Starting from the north end of the city, the area moves along Route 10 and continues east to the junction of Pleasant and Main Streets. The area extends south on Main Street to the intersection with Clark and Park Streets. Continuing south, the study area includes Union Street while extending out to Clark Street. The project area proceeds down Union reaching out to encompass the area between the Williston Avenue and Payson Avenue intersection near the Nashawannuck Pond. The intersection of Union and Cottage streets at Nashawannuck Pond is the central point of the project area. All of Cottage Street is incorporated into the project. The southeast end of the project area is bounded by the intersection of Cottage, Chapel, and Orchard Streets.

In the north end of the study area, Northampton Street (Route 10) is characterized by mostly single-family homes with a few municipal buildings and businesses. Along Main Street, the majority of buildings are banks, municipal offices, and local merchants, although there are some residences at the east end of the street. Most of the buildings along the north side of Main Street are historically significant, however hardly any along the south side of the street are of any significant age. The buildings along Union Street are comprised mostly of merchants, with a gas station and municipal buildings interspersed. The majority of buildings along Union Street are not on the National Register of Historic Places as in contrast to the buildings on Main Street are mainly of

historic significance. Assorted retail businesses, a couple of bars, a gas station, a vacated movie theater, a factory, and a few residences are located on Cottage Street. There are also several restaurants along Union and Cottage Streets. In addition, there are several parking lots along and behind the streets included in the study area.

III. Downtown Easthampton

A. Historical Buildings in Easthampton

The core of downtown Easthampton has the advantage of numerous historical buildings. The section of Main Street from the library to Northampton Street is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. While one residential building, the Seth James House is nearly 250 years old, most of the structures were constructed between 1850 and 1880. Buildings of particular architectural distinction are the town hall and public library. With the exception of the buildings built within the last 35 years across from town hall, this section of the downtown district maintains a coherent appearance, with great architectural interest.

Cottage Street is an intact example of an early 20th century commercial district, with few modern intrusions. Anchored on the lower end by Nashawannuck Pond and One Cottage Street Mill, this street maintains the ambiance of its original era. The historic character of Union Street, however, has been impacted by the construction of newer commercial buildings, with pavement lying close to the street. Yet, many historic structures remain. With landscaping, improved sidewalks and additional architectural features, some of the early 20th century character of Union Street could be restored.

B. Visioning in Easthampton

In early 1998, the city of Easthampton organized a visioning process. Its purpose was to assemble a large group of community people to share their ideas of what they wanted their community to look like and to identify ways to achieve their vision. Community values are defined which then served as a foundation for any action plan that would be initiated. Several hundred people in Easthampton were engaged in the visioning process.

Four key themes emerged: improve the water quality and access to Nashawannuck Pond; invest in the safety and physical appearance of the downtown area; provide economic incentives -"market this unique community aggressively"; and improve the lives and education of Easthampton's youth. The impetus for studying improvements to downtown Easthampton came from the first three themes. The proposal to bury utility wires clearly emerged from this visioning process.

C. City of Easthampton – Center Initiative

Easthampton recently has received assistance through the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (MDHCD). The Cecil Group, Inc., was funded through the MDHCD to propose improvements center around Nashawannuck Pond. This report, though focused on a particular part of the downtown, helped also to garner a general public sentiment about the downtown through open meetings. There were concerns raised over pedestrian safety and traffic, the weak connection between Union and Cottage Streets, and a more attractive downtown streetscape. Suggestions for improvements included better defined sidewalks, traffic

calming, open space access improvements, and streetscape changes, such as the burial of overhead utility lines.

D. Businesses

As part of the research, owners of businesses in the downtown were interviewed. The submerging of the utility wires will require several months of construction that will directly affect their businesses. For this reason, their opinions and perspectives carry much weight. A total of 13 business owners located on Union, Cottage, and Main Streets were interviewed.

The questions that were asked were:

1.) Are you familiar with the proposal by the City of Easthampton to enhance the downtown district by submerging the utility wires?

2.) Are you in favor of the proposal, and if so, would you (the business owner) be willing to pay the 2% surcharge on your electric and telephone bills in order to enhance downtown Easthampton?

The following is a summary of the businesses interviewed and their comments of how they believe the project might affect their current business and their future business transactions.

Located at 112 Cottage Street, Judy Vieu, the owner of Lebeau Florist, would be concerned about the duration of the excavation / reconstruction of the proposed utility project. Ms. Vieu cites an example of a business in Northampton that was not profitable

during the construction period, therefore making the owner close the business. Ms. Vieu believes that many of her customers just pass by and stop for flowers, therefore, not always the loyal customer one would always appreciate. She believes if construction was a major nuisance, then those customers may not stop. Ms. Vieu also noted that much of her revenue is during the holiday seasons, therefore requesting that the necessary construction would be limited to months outside the major holidays. When informed about Chapter 166 and the 2% surcharge, Ms. Vieu replied that she would not be willing to pay that extra fee upon her existing electric bill because her business is flowers, her refrigeration is vast, and her monthly electric bills are high.

Ms. Vieu's main concern is to slow down traffic on Cottage Street; she liked the proposal by the Cecil Group to create the stamping of the road so motorists know that they have entered a new pedestrian area. Along the same lines, she would like the rotary to slow down car traffic. She believes that the Cottage Street intersection is a dangerous intersection.

On the same street, the Sakura Gift owner, Charlene Donnelly, feels strongly about the proposal to submerge the utility wires for the downtown district in Easthampton. Mrs. Donnelly believes the excavation and construction will only be part of a larger process and that one needs to look to the future to appreciate the potential positive affects such as a stronger business district. In response to the 2% surcharge question, Mrs. Donnelly said she is supportive of the project and would be willing to pay the additional charge.

Mrs. Donnelly made known that she helps to lead the Cottage Street Station, which is a group of business owners on Cottage Street that are currently working towards

improving the area. They lead such projects as decorating Cottage Street during the holidays as well as decorating Nashawannuck Pond by placing a dock in the middle of the pond in the month of November with a decorated Christmas tree. In addition to holiday decorations, the group works jointly with the City of Easthampton to improve the ambiance of Cottage Street.

Jim Moynihan, owner of Jim's Package Store on Cottage St., is a strong supporter of any type of improvements that would enhance Cottage Street and Easthampton as a whole. Mr. Moynihan stated that Easthampton is one of the few cities with a pond of this size in their downtown district and should expand upon this asset to enhance the rest of the nearby streets. Mr. Moynihan "would love to see the utility wires placed underground" so that Nashawannuck Pond and the view to Mount Tom would be more enjoyable for the residents and visitors. If the utility project could not be funded entirely through grants, Mr. Moynihan stated he would approve of the increased payment on his electric bill to pay for the utility project, with the long-term goal of increased revenue for his business.

Michael Schrauben, the owner of National Carpet located on Cottage Street, was also in favor of the project to submerge the utility lines. Mr. Schrauben believes his utility bill would not change very much with a 2% surcharge on his current electric and phone bills. He believes that the city needs to enhance the edges and ecological qualities of the pond. Two additional retail stores located on Cottage Street believe that the proposal is a good idea and that it would be beneficial for the downtown business community

Mr. Jeff Doyle, owner of Silver Spoon Restaurant located on Main Street, is another resident who is in favor of the proposal to bury the wires. He believes that it would be great for business in general and especially his business since the construction workers could eat at his restaurant during the construction phases. Mr. Doyle was informed that state and federal funding was being identified that could help alleviate the burden upon the storeowner and decrease the length of the project. However, if other financial assistance was not received, he would still be in favor of the project even if he had to pay a 2% surcharge.

Maria Del Hagen, the owner of Second Chance Clothing Store on Union Street, stated that, "the town of Easthampton should have done everything in their power to keep the Post Office from moving to the outskirts of town. The town should have helped to renovate the Post Office and keep it in the downtown." Ms. Del Hagen has been located in Easthampton and operating her clothing store for 5 years.

Mr. Alan Bouyea, the owner of Jones News, showed less optimism than other business owners in the area. Mr. Bouyea said that he still needs to be convinced by the researchers and town officials that the project would enhance Easthampton. He believes that the underground utility wires alone will not improve Easthampton's downtown district. Mr. Bouyea also remembers that the referendum on the town ballot concerning submerging utilities in 1990 was widely negated by the voters.

Mr. Kris Meyrick, owner of New England Pool and Supply, Inc. located on Union Street, believes that the town should be able use the commercial property taxes to aid in the payment for such a project as this. Mr. Meyrick would like to see an improved business district in the downtown, which he believes is long overdue. When asked

whether he would be in favor of the proposal, he responded 'Yes', but Mr. Meyrick does not want to have to pay additional charges to accomplish the proposed project. He believes that his current commercial property taxes should be able to cover the cost of the project.

In conclusion, there are many factors that add to the character of downtown Easthampton. There is much history coupled with a growing interest in improvements to the downtown area. The proposal to put the utility lines underground is one of the possible improvements and it has support from many residents and downtown business owners. It has the potential to affect the business, historical, and scenic aspects of the downtown.

V. Moving the Utility Lines

A. Costs

1. Cost Projections by Utilities

A major goal of the project was to determine the cost of burying utility wires beneath the streets in downtown Easthampton. The three utilities systems affected are telephone, cable television, and electricity. Currently the companies providing service to Easthampton are: Bell Atlantic, Greater Media Cable and Western Mass Electric.

Of the three companies contacted, the team had the most confidence in the figures provided by Western Mass Electric. This utility had studied a portion of the project area in 1991 and 1998. The company's area manager, Robin Y. Brown, provided cost estimates as well as a current account of the revenue paid by electrical users in

Easthampton for a 12-month period ending as recently as February 2000. This information was critical for calculating how much Easthampton residents and businesses would have to pay if a 2% surcharge was added to their bills to pay for burying utilities.

The Bell Atlantic Telephone Company was contacted numerous times but did not provide any information for the study. Engineers from the company said they could not divulge the revenue collected from Easthampton because they did not want their competitors to obtain it, so they forwarded requests to Public Relations. The needed information is still forthcoming.

Without data on Easthampton from Bell Atlantic, we examined five Massachusetts communities with plans or experience submerging telephone wires. We hoped we might determine an average cost per lineal foot which then could be projected to the Easthampton project. However, with the exception of on town, Westwood, MA, we were not able to determine the exact cost in these communities. In most cases the telephone cost was either not itemized or the installation was not done in a common trench as is likely to be the case in Easthampton. Therefore, we do not believe this study has reliable information to offer for the cost area. Yet, should the city wish to bury its wires, Bell Atlantic would have to provide the City of Easthampton with a budget of cost and revenue since the Massachusetts General Law Chapter 166 provides the mechanism for communities to work with utilities to determine costs and financing of moving utilities.

The cable television company servicing Easthampton, Greater Media, estimated the cost of burying cable wires at $35-40,000 per mile. They did not provide any details on how this figure was obtained. However, it is likely the cost of changing the cable

installation is a small fraction of what it costs to bury the other utility lines. The cable system is far less complex than the telephone and electrical systems and therefore, less costly. In fact, in 3 of the 5 towns we studied the underground cable installation was completely paid for by the company and not the subscribers. The decision to cover the installation was made by 3 different companies for the same reason – competition. These companies were unwilling to risk losing their business to a competing company that might be willing to do the installation at no cost to consumers.

The costs estimates obtained from the utilities include design and engineering, construction, and investments for future costs. For the utility lines to be buried, the road and/or sidewalks must be dug up. The area is excavated to create a common trench for all the utilities to use. In the trench, the ducts (Figure A – Appendix B) and vaults (Figure B – Appendix B) would be placed to protect the lines and provide space for the utility worker to access the trouble spots.

2. Road Reconstruction and Amenities

While the utility companies will repair the road, the city will probably choose to reconstruct the roadbed and sidewalks with help from the state. As this reconstruction occurs, there will be room for widening the sidewalks and improving the traffic conditions. As suggested by the Cecil Group, pavement treatments like street printing could be used to modify the roads and help with traffic calming. With the removal of the telephone poles, new structures will be needed to support street lighting. As well, street trees will be possible now that the wires will not interfere with trees growth. Costs that

will come from amenities may include: period lighting, benches, street trees, trash receptacles, signs, bike racks, and outdoor kiosks.

B. Agencies Involved

The utilities with overhead lines involved in this move in Easthampton are Western Massachusetts Electric Company, Bell Atlantic Telephone, and Greater Media Cable. The other utilities that are affected by this move are sewer, water, and gas. These utilities already exist underground and the Department of Public Works in Easthampton will need to be consulted to determine the locations of each. Another group besides utilities that should be involved in this process is the Massachusetts Highway Commission (MHC). Since Easthampton is located on state roads, the MHC will be a partner and a possible contributor of funds.

From that point, city representatives or a designated committee would need to bring the all groups together to begin discussions. The main topics of discussion will be funding, engineering, and construction.

VI. Case Studies

Five Massachusetts towns were identified that had recent experience with the burial of utilities. These towns are: Bedford, Holden, Marblehead, Norfolk and Westwood. All five are small communities and located in the Boston and Worcester areas. Most were comparable in population and geographical size to Easthampton (see chart, appendix). Also, each project was concentrated in the town's commercial district.

A common theme in these communities was a desire to make their town centers more attractive. Norfolk and Bedford also had a goal of creating a sense of place by including other streetscape improvements, such as the addition of sidewalks, landscaping and lighting in addition to the underground burial project. Unlike Easthampton, none of these communities had an industrial base in their downtown district. However, the presence of historical buildings interspersed with strip development was evident in of four out of the five towns.

Each community used the provisions of Chapter 166: Section 22 of the Massachusetts General Laws to finance the burial of utilities. However, the extent to which it was used and how much of the project it financed varied. For example, all communities paid for the cost of buying the telephone lines by assessing a 2% surcharge to monthly phone bills. Bedford and Westwood used the surcharge method for the electrical conversion cost as well. In contrast, the town of Norfolk passed a special act of the legislature so it could borrow money to pay for the cost of electrical burial up front. The act made this possible by having the utility agree to pass the revenue from the 2% surcharge back to the city so it could gradually pay off the loan. Otherwise it would have taken nearly 8 years for the town to finance the whole project through the surcharge since the utility was unwilling to proceed with the project without complete financing up front.

The burial of electrical wires differed for the towns of Holden and Marblehead because each had their own municipally owned electric companies. These electric companies chose not to impose a surcharge but rather absorbed the cost within their budget by foregoing other infrastructure improvements.

The cable TV companies in 3 of the 5 communities studied covered the cost of burying its wires underground. They elected not to charge the customers because the added cost would have made them less competitive with other cable companies.

All of the communities studied used the burial of utilities as part of a larger effort to improve their downtown areas. New sidewalks, period lighting fixtures and landscaping were the norm. Funds for these amenities were acquired either through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) (now the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)) or Public Works Economic Development (PWED) grant programs. For example, Marblehead received $850,000 for streetscape and road improvements through PWED.

With the exception of Marblehead, all of the projects in the downtown areas were on state roads that crossed through the center of town. The number of cars driving through town each day usually exceeded 20,000, which is remarkably similar to Easthampton's traffic count that fluctuates between 14, 000 and 22,000.

The length of time it took to put the wires underground was similar in all five towns: approval, engineering, construction and completion is approximately 5 years.

Although the projects generally took the same amount of time from start to finish, the timetable differed among the towns. For example, tourism anchors the Marblehead economy. Consequently, all construction on its burial project is stopped during the summer months. Progress is slow as digging work is only done from April to June and September through November.

The town of Holden decided to excavate the streets at night to minimize the impact on local businesses and reduce traffic tie-ups. While this may have appeased the merchants, nearby residents had to endure the noise at night when most wanted to sleep.

Several lessons can be learned from the experience of the five towns that have undertaken the burial of utility wires in the last decade. These lessons could be useful to communities considering a burial project:

1. Establish a Wires Committee or identify a local champion who is knowledgeable about the burial process and prevailing public sentiment, in order to move the project forward. Norfolk credits an active committee with garnering the necessary support for approval.
2. Negotiating for discounts and creative fundraising will lower the costs of the project to town residents. Holden was able to get the Massachusetts Highway Department to contribute the project $327,000 that it would have cost to move the utility poles if they were to be re-located when the road was widened. This money was then used to offset some of the burial costs. The award of $850,000 from the state's PWED grant program to the town of Marblehead was linked the historic character of the project's location.
3. Thorough engineering work needs to be done before excavation. The town of Bedford encountered shallow bedrock that made installation of the underground vaults more difficult and expensive. While this problem might have been foreseen, the discovery of hazardous materials that needed to be removed added to the project cost and might not have been predicted.

4. When phasing a project over time, it is important to obtain authorization for the entire project, even though financing and construction will be spread out over many years. The town of Westwood had the experience of doing three separate burial projects. By the time approval was needed for the last project, increased utility rates had kicked in, spurring on opposition from residents against further increase in their utility bills. It took two years to get approval for the final project.
5. Consider financing a portion of the project as a capital improvement program. The town of Holden committed $1.6 million from its Infrastructure Investment Fund. This contribution reduced the number of years needed to pay for the project.
6. Balance the needs of the business community and residents when scheduling construction work. Of the four communities studied where underground burial was completed or underway, three different approaches were taken to respond to the special needs of the town.
7. Prepare the community for the disruption and detours that will take place during construction. The impact of the project can range from being a slight inconvenience to a "nightmare." Town official should attempt to update the community regularly since burying utilities underground is a complex, sequential process that takes longer to complete than most people realize. Writing a regular, monthly report in the local newspaper or meeting with community organizations and church groups are advised. People will really want to know what's going on. The town of Holden had a unique approach to

keeping residents informed. It made a 30-minute video program for the local cable access television station that explained the burial process with diagrams and actual footage of the nighttime installation. The show was so well received it became the most popularly requested re-run.[1]

8. All the underground burial projects were followed by site improvements and amenities. The towns added newly paved and designed roads, sidewalks, landscaping, street lights (usually period lighting), street trees, shrubs, and decorative brickwork. These towns invested in utility burial as part of a package to upgrade the appearance of their commercial areas and town centers.
9. Cooperation and planning among utilities and agencies saves time and money. Several towns emphasized how it was important to schedule the burial projects with other infrastructure improvements, such as water and sewer upgrades to cut costs. Using one contractor to install all the utilities – electric, telephone and cable, can reduce coordination problems if permitted by regulation.

(For the case study chart see Appendix A)

VII. Financing of the Project

A. Impact on the City

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 166: Section 22 addresses the relationship between a municipality and utility companies operating in that municipality. It grants the municipalities the power to gather public information and then enact a bylaw to require

[1] Brian Bullock, Holden Town Manager..

utilities to move their wires underground and to prohibit any further overhead wire construction. Once this act has been passed, the municipality enters into an agreement with the utility companies specifying the areas where utilities should be taken down and replaced, and indicating how this process is to be funded. Section 22E and 22M, authorize a 2% surcharge based on the utility bills to be levied in the area under change. These funds can then be utilized by the utility company to pay for the construction or be used by the municipality to specifically fund this move.

> *Section 22E*. Any utility organized and existing under the laws of or doing business in this commonwealth and any municipality may enter into, and from time to time amend, and perform a cooperation agreement pursuant to which (a) the utility shall pay to the municipality in each calendar year for a period of years specified in such agreement an amount which shall be not less than two per cent of such utility's gross revenue derived during the next preceding calendar year from its customers in said municipality and (b) the municipality shall expend during such term as such agreement may specify an amount not exceeding the sums paid to it by the utility pursuant to such agreement to remove (or cause to be removed) any poles and overhead wires and associated overhead structures of such utility and, if needed for the continuation of such utility's service, to replace the same (or cause them to be replaced) with underground facilities....

> *Section 22M*. In addition to all other rates, charges and fees it may otherwise be authorized to impose and collect any utility shall impose and collect as a capital contribution towards the cost of construction a surcharge of two per cent on its total billing to each customer located in a city or town which has in force and effect an ordinance or by-law adopted in accordance with the provisions of section twenty-two D, provided said utility is not in violation of the provisions of said ordinance or by-law and provided further said ordinance or by-law has been in effect for a period of at least one year. (The full text of Chapter 166: Section 22 can be found in the appendix)

Sample rates that demonstrate the impact of a 2% surcharge were calculated using information provided by Western Massachusetts Electric Company. For a resident

heating with electricity the surcharge would be approximately $ 0.46 per week; for a resident who does not heat with electric the surcharge would approximately be $ 0.27 per week (Cost of Burying Electricity - Appendix A). The surcharge remains constant over the whole project life, and it is this project life that varies according to the scope of the project.

B. Potential Sources of Funding

As seen in the case studies, the other communities in Massachusetts who have submerged their utility lines used outside sources of funding as well as the utility surcharge to finance the move. Each utilized a funding scheme taking advantage of state, federal, and local aid. For Easthampton, there is much potential for finding funding from a variety of sources. The following options relate mainly to the burying of the wires, but also address funding that can be used to pay for effects of utility burial such as amenities and building improvements.

The submerging of the utility lines will require excavation and repair of the streets and sidewalks in downtown Easthampton. Since these transportation corridors will be affected, transportation grants are a viable source of funding. They can be used to fund part of the move or to fund the repair of the road and improvements to the sidewalk. The main requirement of these grants is to demonstrate that the changes paid for will result in economic benefits. One grant that has been given money to similar projects is the Public Works Economic Development (PWED) Grant. In one instance, PWED provided $850,000 to Marblehead, MA, for street enhancements after the burial.

Nashawannuck Pond is a key component of downtown Easthampton and it will be affected by the undergrounding of utility lines. Due to the location of Nashawannuck Pond, there are funds such as Lake and Pond Grant Program that can be used to offset costs arising from around this area. Another environmental funding source is the Massachusetts ReLeaf Grant program. Mass ReLeaf provides money for the purchase and use of street trees. Trees have potential to be a large part of the amenities added after burying the lines, and this program is a good source to help get them.

Downtown Easthampton includes many historic buildings, especially on Main Street where several are on the National Historic Register. This fact is an advantage for Easthampton because historic funding can be a great source of money. Aid ranges from Historic Preservation Certification, which offers tax credits for rehabilitation costs, to the Preservation Projects Fund, which provides direct funds for historic preservation. The historic buildings of Easthampton add character to the downtown, and they will need to maintain this character especially when the wires come down.

The movement of the utility lines will have direct effects, both physically and psychologically, on the community of Easthampton. Therefore, community grant funding can be used to help finance the move. Community Development Action Grants (CDAG) is just one example of state money that can be used directly to pay for move. These grants are specifically offered for economic development and investment in publicly owned property.

There are many sources that can be used to provide money for the costs during and after the moving of the utility lines. Although, other communities have used only

some of the proposed sources, Easthampton has the possibility to utilize many of these sources. Easthampton has many more unique characteristics that make them eligible for funding.

(A detailed list of possible funding sources is in Appendix A.)

VIII. Potential Impact of Project

A. Real Estate Values

To understand the benefits that the proposed change would bring to the City of Easthampton, the group visited Taylor Real Estate located on Main Street. Mr. Robert Conner, a long-time resident of Easthampton and employee of Taylor Real Estate, stated, "The benefits would outweigh the costs."

In addition to Mr. Conner, several real estate appraisers were contacted, including FSI Appraisal Company (Northampton), Northampton Appraisal Association (Northampton), and Western Massachusetts Chapter of Appraisal Institute (Amherst). Although many never had experience to say for sure, each stated that the effects are minimal to none because the utilities are usually located in buffer areas. We have learned that they have no quantifiable way of assessing this enhancement even though all stated that aesthetic qualities would certainly be enhanced by the move.

To look at the issue from the other side, an assessor from Amherst was contacted to examine if the assessed value of a property would increase or decrease after the submerging of utilities. The assessor said that there is no scheme or factors that are included in the assessor's report that would take into account the moving of the utilities.

In the other towns that we studied, the submerging of the utility lines was either just recently completed or they were in the process. Therefore, we were not able to determine the potential real estate effects on the buildings in the vicinity of the move.

B. Williston-Northampton School

Originally founded as the Williston Seminary in 1841, the Williston Northampton School has been a strong presence in Easthampton for over 150 years. Its first campus was on Main Street, across from Town Hall. In 1971 it merged with the Northampton School for Girls. Now it is situated near Nashawannuck Pond along Payson Avenue and Park Street. Both day and boarding students, including a number from foreign countries, attend the school. Recognized by the U. S. Department of Education for excellence, the Williston Northampton School enrolls 530 middle and secondary school students. Some 260 high school age students and many of its faculty and administrators reside at the school.

Chuck McCullagh, Business Manager for the Williston Northampton School, believes a vibrant downtown Easthampton would be good for the school. It would provide a nearby outlet for the students to shop and socialize. Currently students board the public bus to Northampton to buy records, clothes, books and sundries. In addition, it would serve as an attraction to numerous parents and visitors to the school.

To make a more visible connection to the community, the Williston Northampton board of directors recently approved the funding of a master plan to create gateways to the campus at the 4 approaches to the school. At least 2 of these gateways are at the edge of the downtown district. This project might extend the visual impact of period street

lighting and other sidewalk improvements currently under discussion for the core of Easthampton.

C. Downtown rejuvenation

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the downtown. Removing the overhead utilities would be a beneficial to further these interests. Although no quantifiable results were discovered to be a result of submerging the utilities, there are various benefits that could possibly result in great change in downtown Easthampton.

The residents of Easthampton have referred to the wires in the downtown area as visual clutter. With the submerging of the wires, these visual detractions would be removed, and as a result the scenic views to Mt. Tom, Nashawannuck Pond, and the horizon would be open. Moreover, greater visibility would be given to the businesses in the downtown area.

With businesses being more visible, both from the sidewalk and the street, a greater interest may arise in shopping in the downtown area. In addition, this would be a good opportunity for the shops to improve their facades, adding to the aesthetic improvements of the downtown area.

Businesses would benefit from increased pedestrian traffic in the downtown. As the wires are moved underground, the sidewalks will be under construction. After burial is complete, the poles will be removed and there will be an opportunity to widen the sidewalks. These safer and more attractive sidewalks should act as greater invitation to walk the downtown.

More amenities will be possible as the sidewalks are widened. Through the use of amenities like street trees, benches, and signage, people will be drawn to the downtown and pulled along the streets rather than feeling like they want to use their cars, as some residents say they presently feel.

A technical advantage may also result from the burial of the utilities. Some of the utility systems, specifically electric, are antiquated and will have the opportunity to upgrade their systems. If the utilities take advantage of this opportunity, the downtown area will benefit from not only an improved image, but an improved infrastructure.

The moving of utility lines underground will have numerous impacts. It will affect public sentiment, important institutions in Easthampton, and possibly the values of the buildings in the downtown. There will be costs to the process, but it must be recognized that this move will potentially result in many more benefits, both socially and economically.

IX. Recommendations

The submerging of utility lines is an extensive and lengthy process. It should be part of larger, comprehensive plan that addresses the overall issue of downtown revitalization. So, when the part of the revitalization that deals with the utility lines is addressed, there are a few options from which the City of Easthampton may choose.

Option 1. The City could decide not to do anything about the utility lines. Leaving the wires up costs nothing so the city would not have to worry about any price tags. Residents have cited visual clutter as a downtown problem, but maybe there are

areas more needing of change. However, the problem may continue to exist and an opportunity may be passed over.

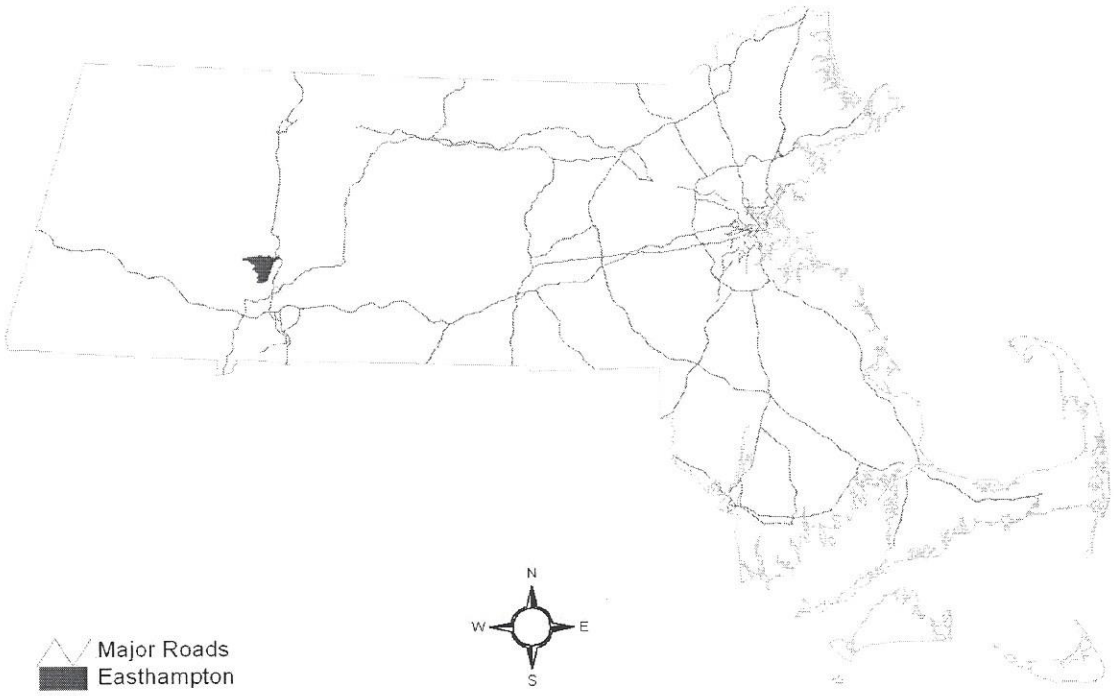
Option 2. The city could go forward with the plans submitted by the Cecil group and concentrate on the area around Nashawannuck Pond. The proposed changes require a commitment by the whole city. It would address the issues of traffic calming, improving pedestrian walkways and pedestrian use of downtown, and it would move some of the utility lines underground. In reference to the utilities, this could be a first taste for the city. Residents and businesses could get an idea of what the surcharge means on their utility bills and they could get a small glimpse of what their downtown looks like without utility lines. (Figure 4. Option 2 – Appendix B)

Option 3. The city could decide to make changes at the intersection combined with the submerging of utility lines along Union Street. This move would be larger and more expensive than the Cecil Group's project, but there are greater and more expensive benefits that could result. Nashawannuck Pond would be opened up as would some of the scenic views to Mount Tom. Furthermore, it is believed that a greater connectivity would be created in the downtown between Main, Union, and Cottage Streets. All the buildings along Union would be more visible and the sidewalk would be less cluttered. The opportunity will exist to widen the sidewalks and add street trees. This type of downtown environment has the potential to attract more pedestrians and to keep them walking throughout the downtown and not getting into their cars. By addressing more than just the intersection, the town will be acting upon a larger vision of their future. (Figure 5. Option 2 – Appendix B).

X. Conclusion

Presently, the City of Easthampton is pushing for change. The residents have great spirits and aspirations as they work for an attractive, revitalized downtown. The submerging of the utility lines is just one of the paths that may be taken towards this goal. It is an intensive and lengthy process that will require sacrifices from the whole city, and it will need to be one of many comprehensive changes in order to result in a well-defined and vital downtown. After spending time in Easthampton, it is clear that this city is committed and open to change. Easthampton wants to be an active participant in determining where it will be in the years to come.

Appendix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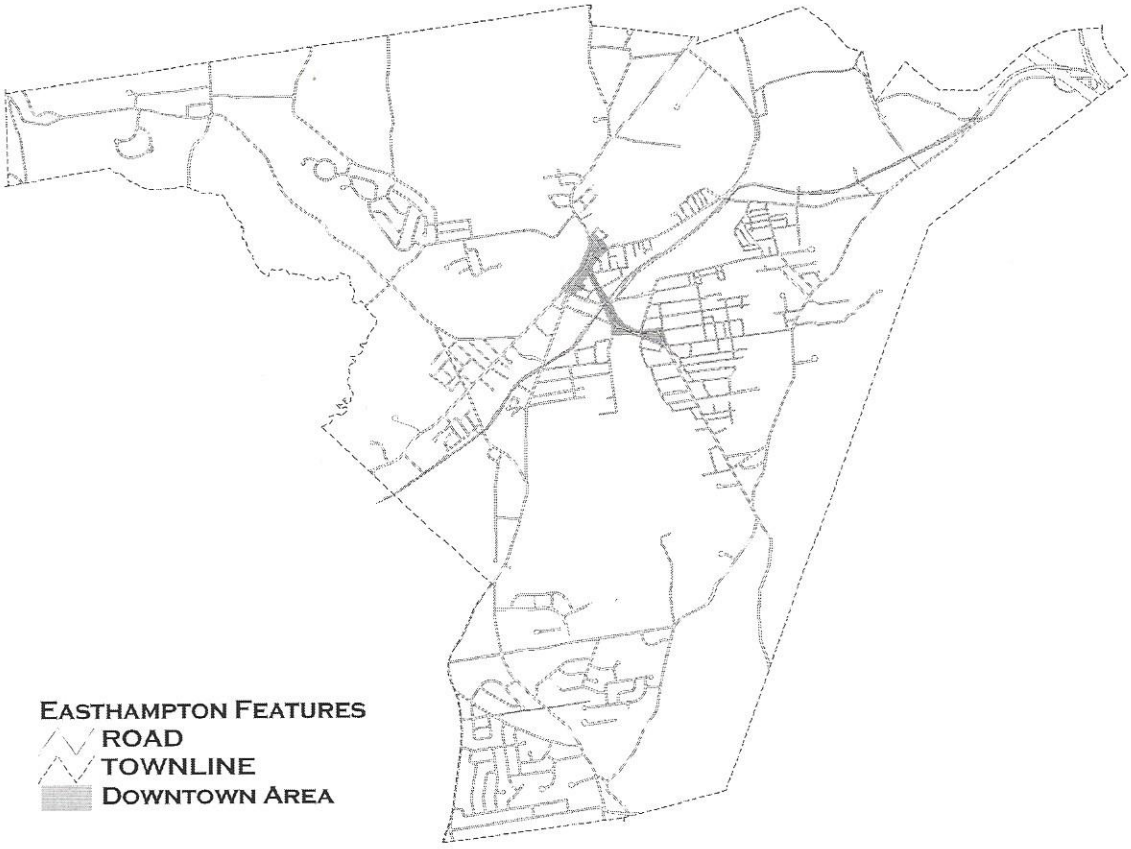
Major Roads
Easthampton


EASTHAMPTON FEATURES
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TOWNLINE
DOWNTOWN AREA


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RAILROAD
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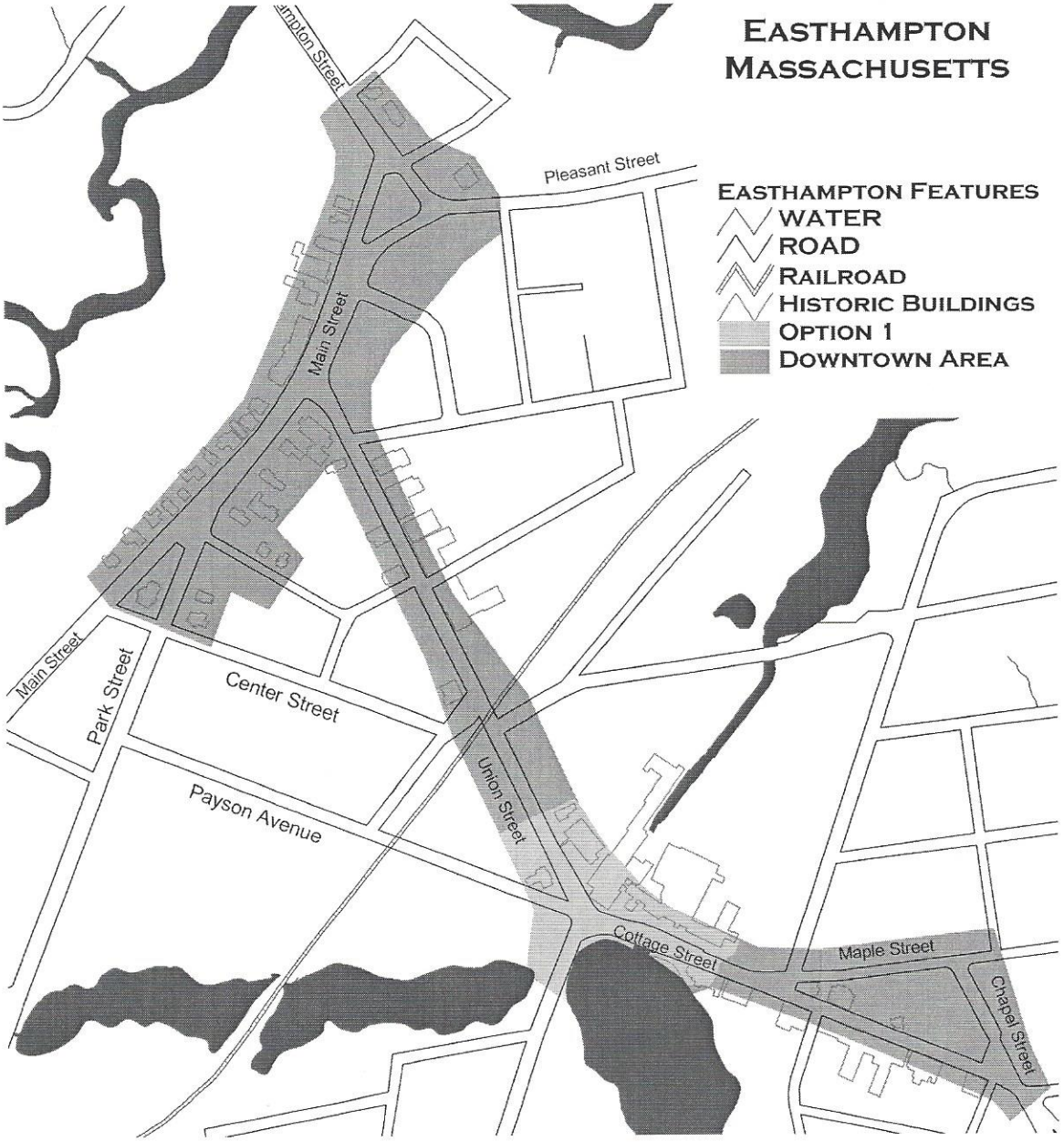
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WATER
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HISTORIC BUILDINGS
OPTION 1
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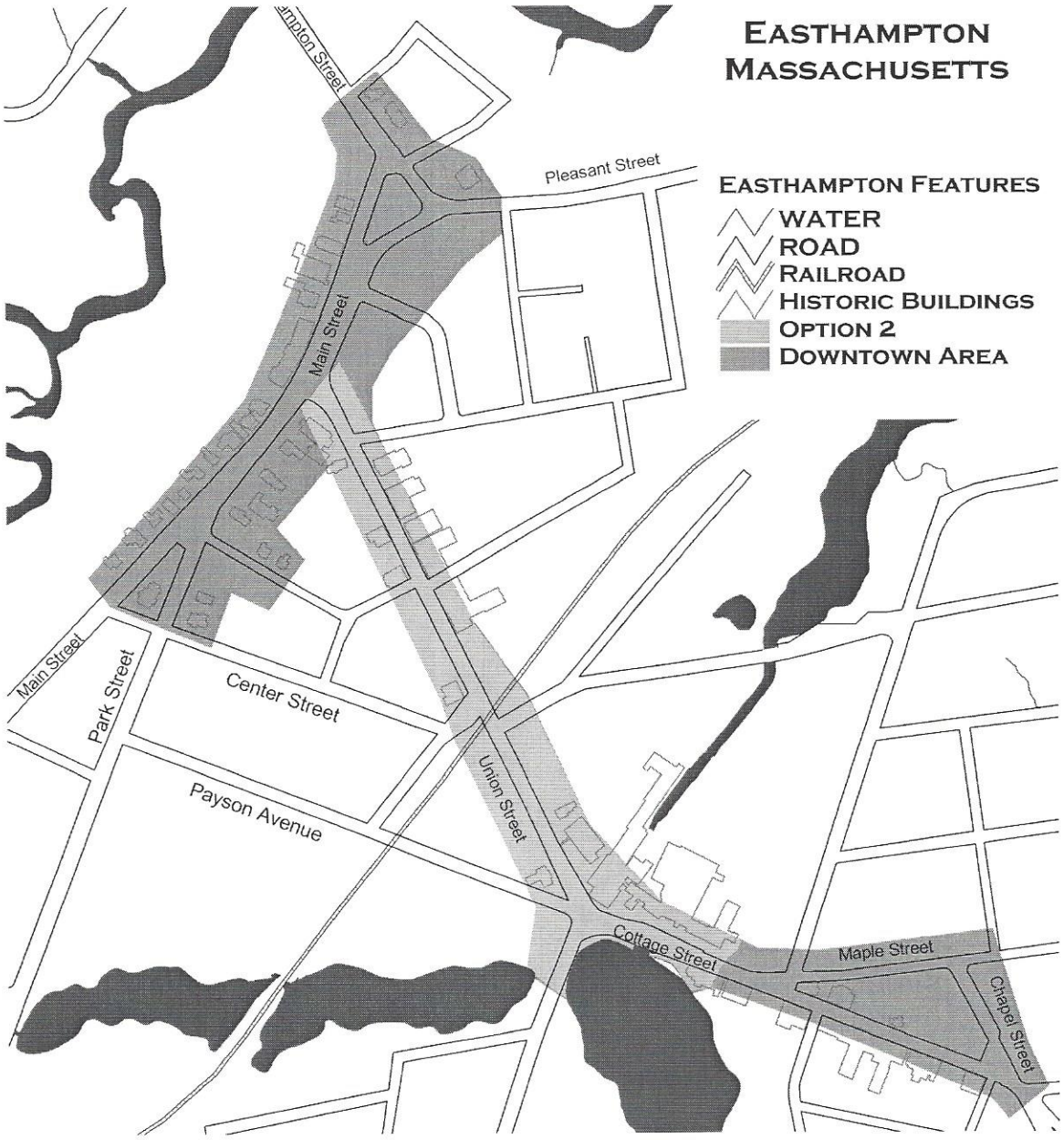
Maple Street
Chapel Street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HISTORIC BUILDINGS
OPTION 2
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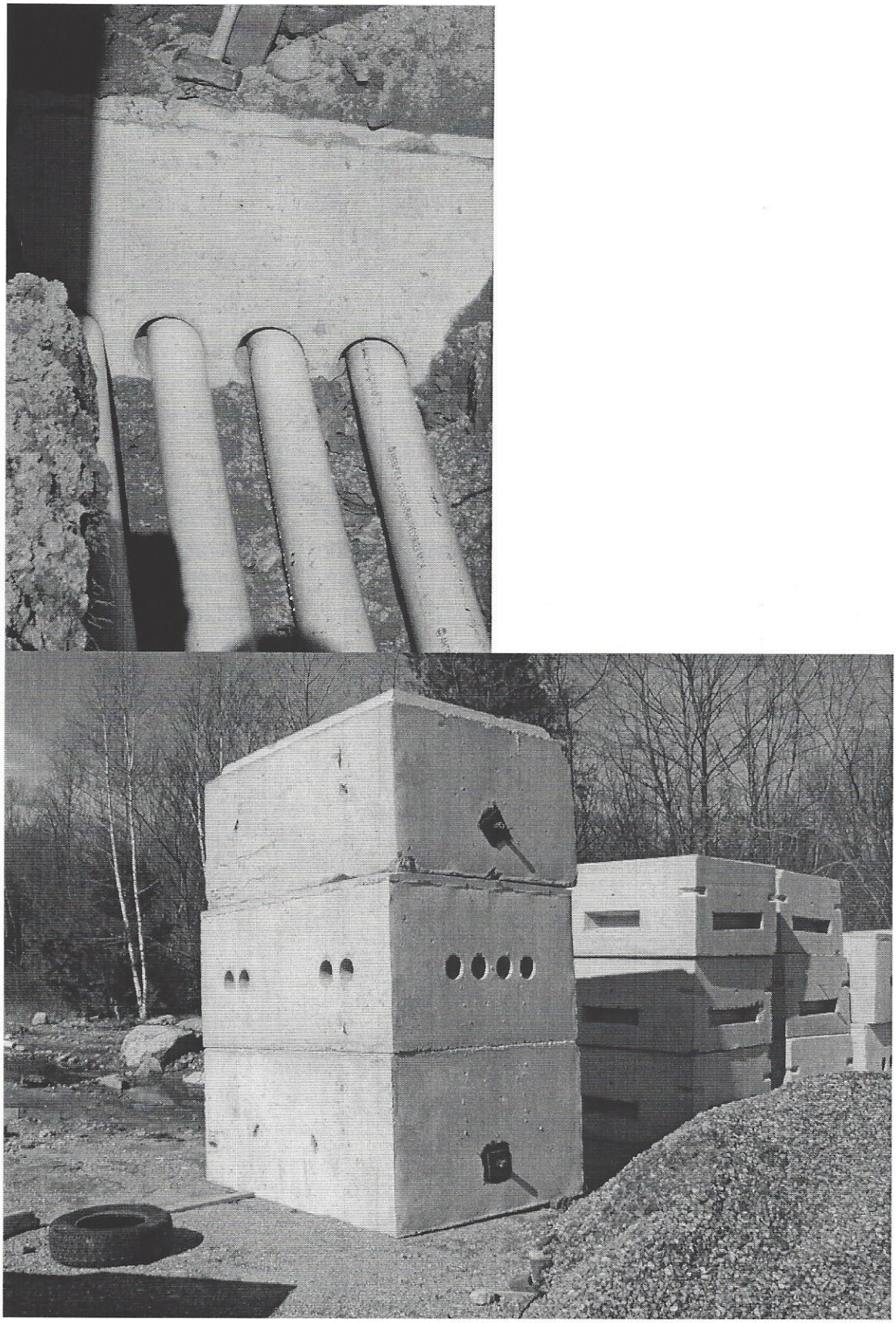

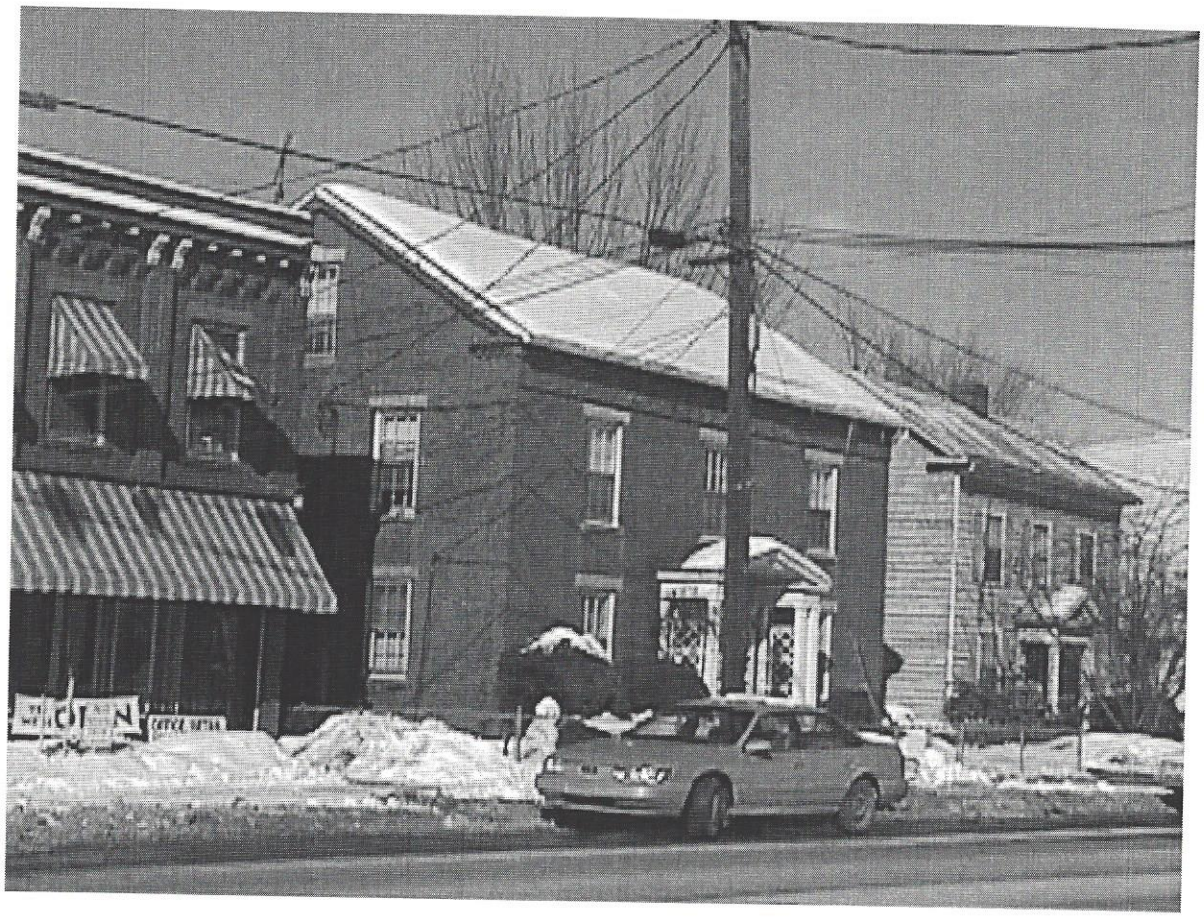

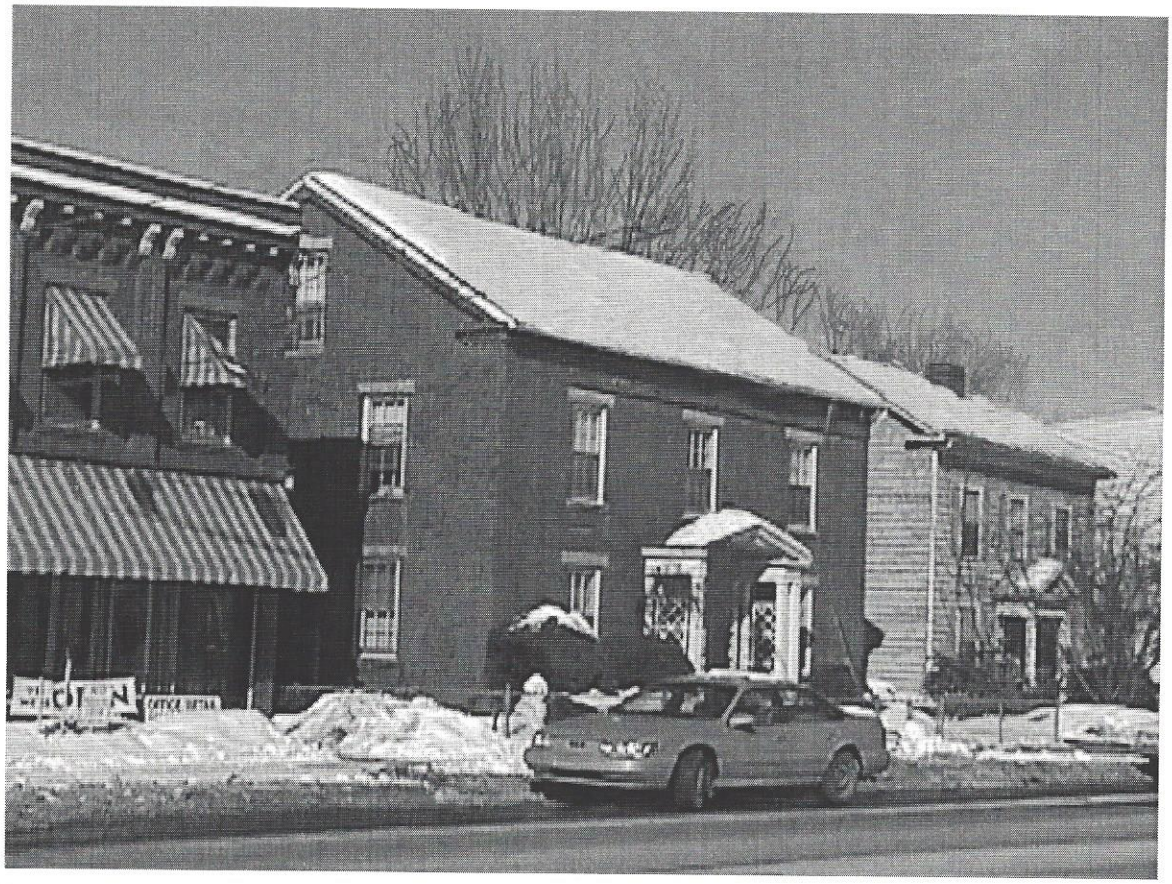

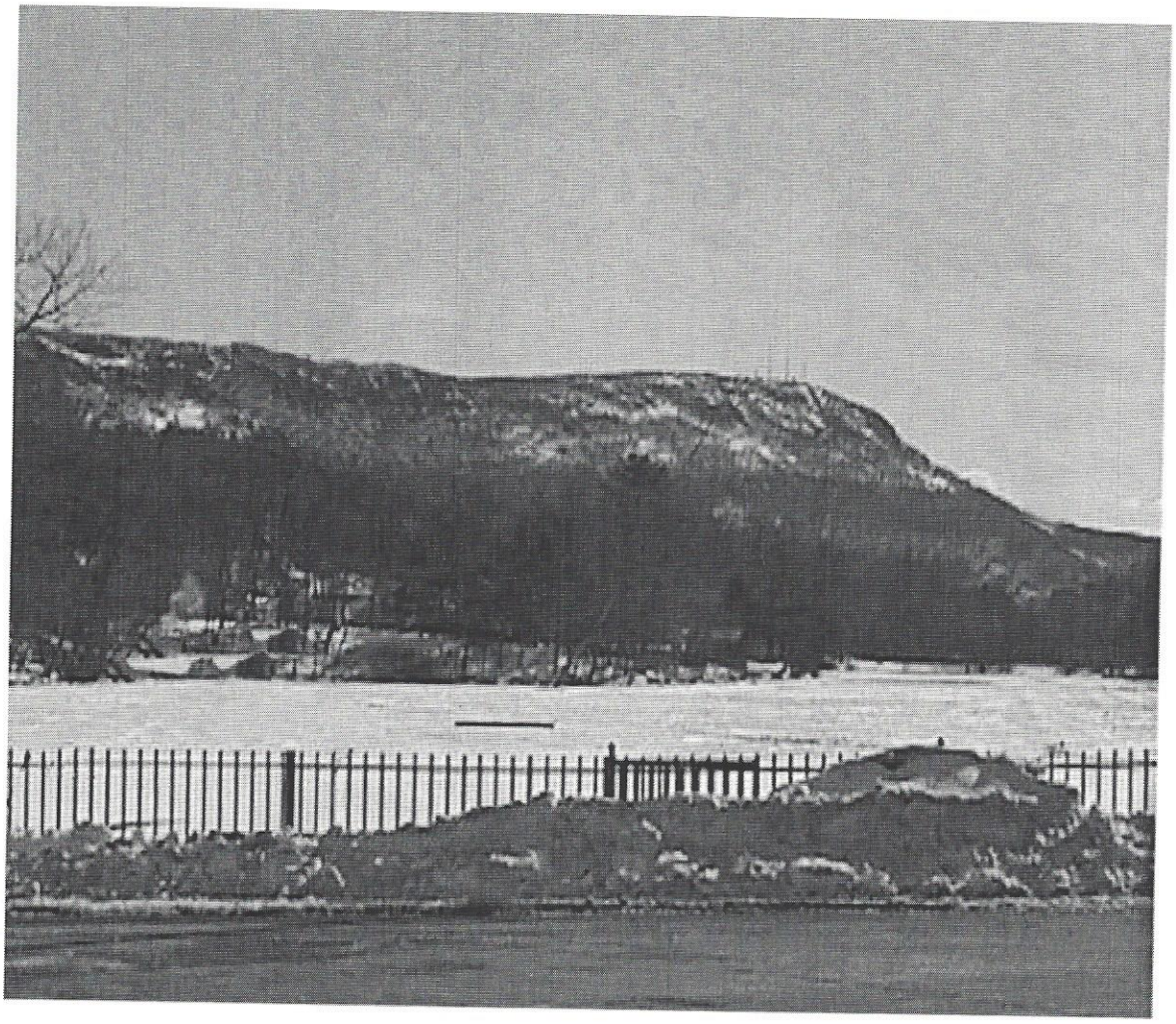

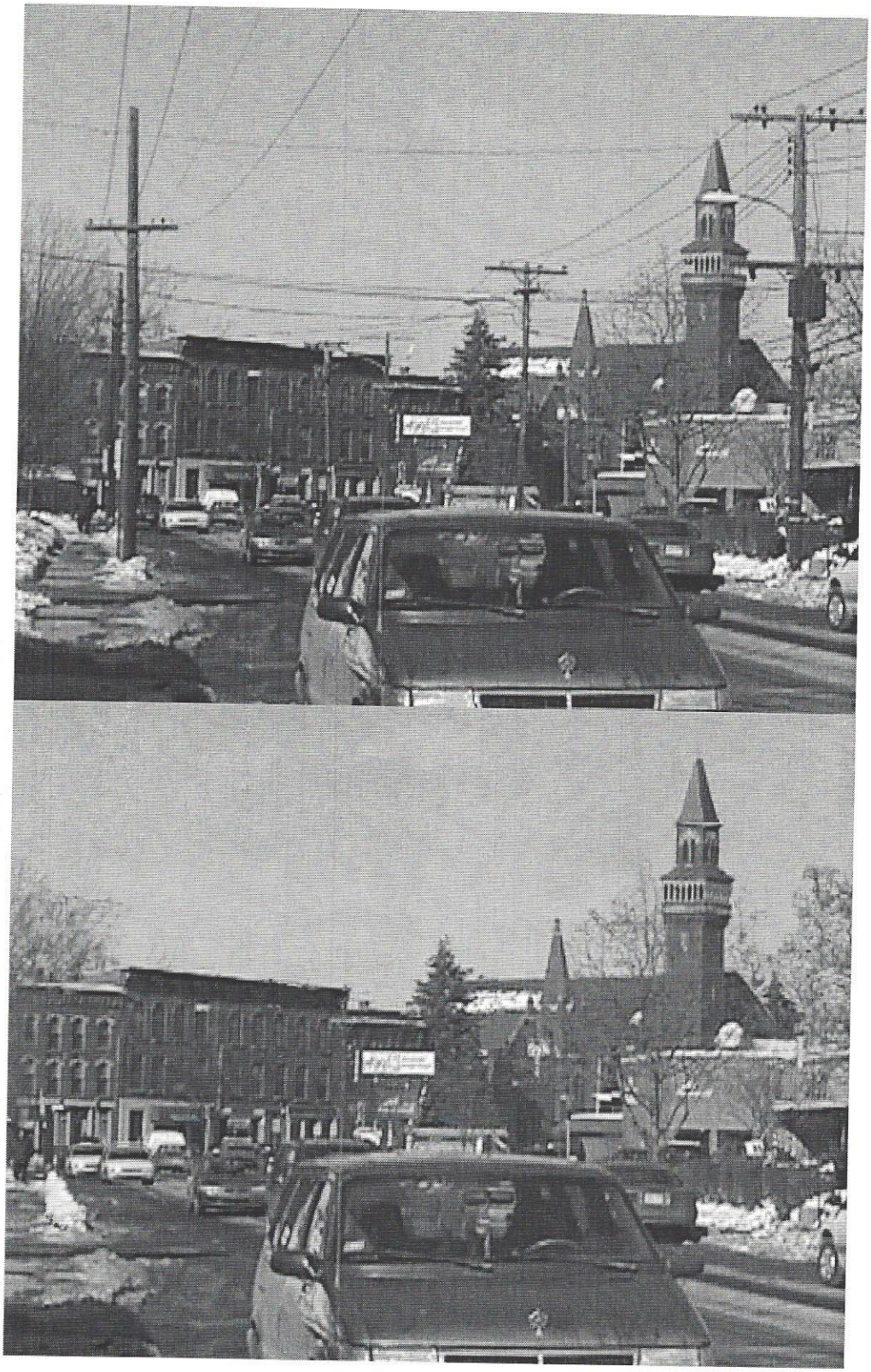

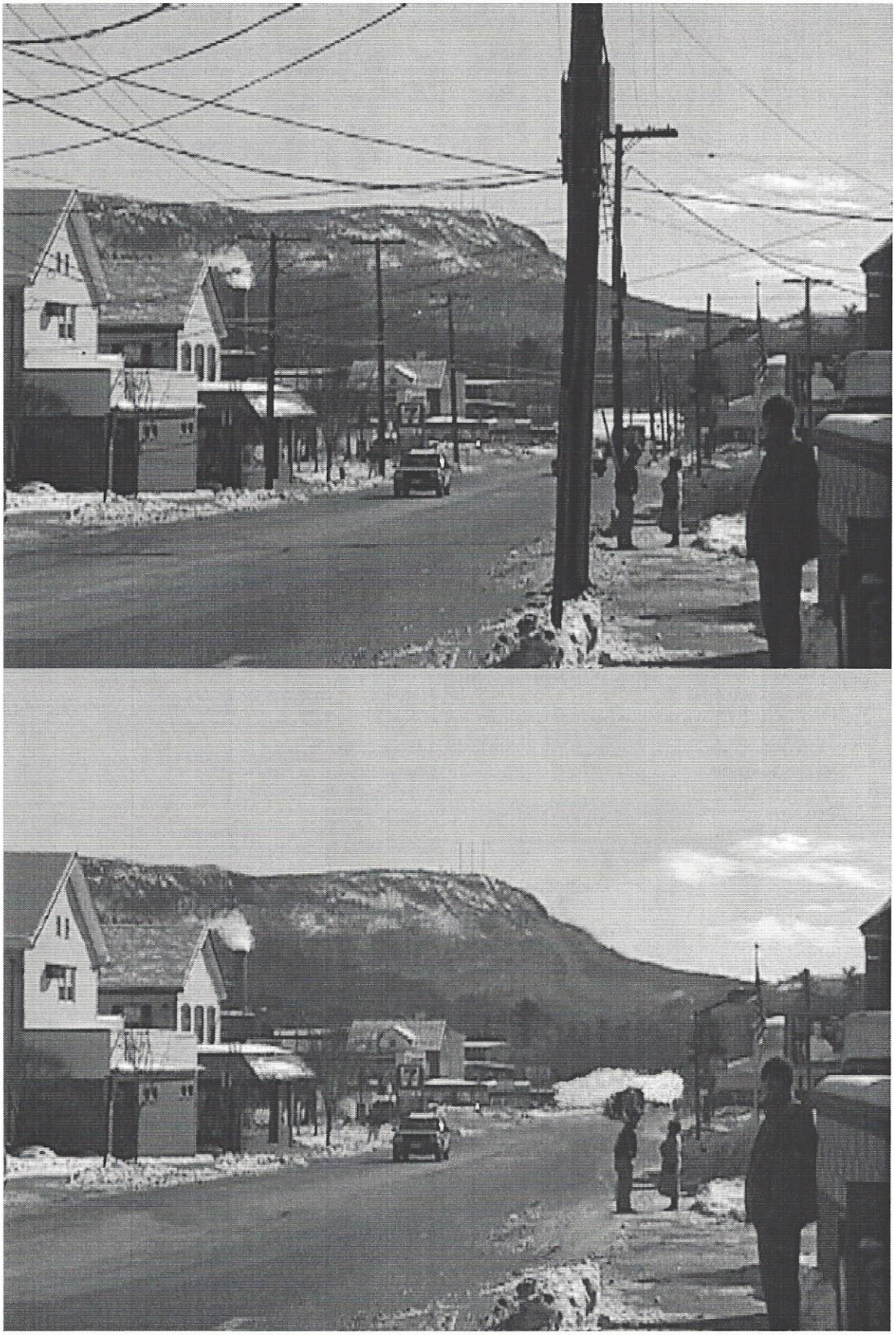

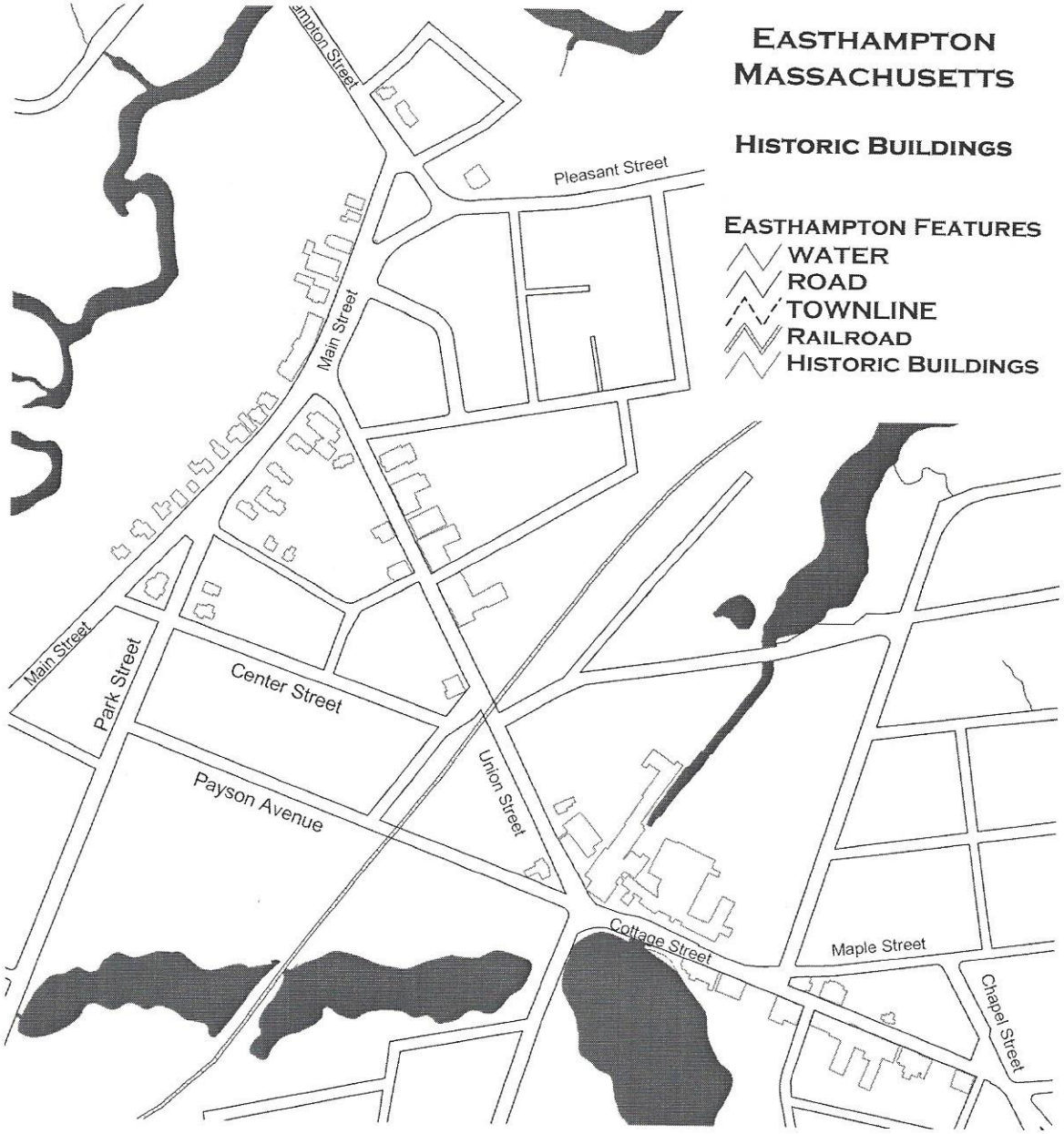
EASTHAMPTON
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List of Historic Buildings

The following buildings have been officially designated in the National Register of Historic Places, March 17, 1986.

Main Street

Street Number	Year Built	Building Type
14	1755	Seth James House, residence
16	1860	Matthew Russell House, Italianate residence
19	1913	Vista Apartments, Colonial Revival residence
23-25	1893	Hanum House, Italianate residence
35	1895	Wendall Apartments, Colonial Revival
43	1867-1869	Town Hall, Ruskinian Gothic
51	1892-1893	Providence Methodist Church, Gothic Revival
63	1871	Old First National Bank Building
67-75	1861	Masonic Building
75 ½-81	1868	Pomeroy Block, commercial
83-87	1849	Preston Block, commercial
91	1866	Winslow Block, commercial
101	1865	Lambie Block, commercial
112	1852	Payson Church (rebuilt 1858)
112	1879-1880	Payson Church Chapel
116	1853	Payson Church Parsonage (rebuilt 1855)
128	1901-1902	St. Philip's Church
130	1860	Clark House, residence
135	1867	Shoals House, Greek Revival residence
143	1851	William Lyman House, residence
149-151	1884	Dickinson House, Greek Revival residence
157	1859	William Lyman House II, Greek Revival residence
159	1881	Sanders-Cobb House, residence
163	1899	Lyman-Roberts House, Colonial Revival Cottage
165	1850	Johnson House, Greek Revival residence
167	1850-1870	Benjamin Lyman House, Italianate residence

Union Street

Street Number	Year Built	Building Type
19	1863	Knight-Bly House, Greek Revival residence

Park Street

Street Number	Year Built	Building Type
4	1912	Park School
8	1865	Clark-Alcock House, Italianate residence
9	1881	Easthampton Public Library
10	1877	Jewett House, Italianate/Queen Anne residence

Northampton Street

Street Number	Year Built	Building Type
1	1865	Memorial Hall
9	1850	Auto Parts Store with substantial alterations
13	1846	1st Congregational Church Parsonage, Greek Revival

Clark Avenue

Street Number	Year Built	Building Type
7	1897	Clark-Wood-Searle House, residence
11	1893	Clark-Leitch House, residence

Massachusetts Historical Commission Registration

In addition to the buildings that have been placed on the National Historic Register, the Easthampton Historical Commission recorded the following buildings with the Massachusetts Historical Commission in November 1987.

Cottage Street

Street Number	Year Built	Building Type
1	1850, 1855	Italianate Industrial, Mill building
20-32	1932	Colonial Revival Commercial
34-42	1932	Colonial Revival Commercial
60-70	1895	Commercial
65	1900	Colonial Revival Commercial
72-78	1928	Colonial Revival Commercial
73	1916	Colonial Revival Commercial
80-82	1928	Colonial Revival Commercial
82 ½	1923	Colonial Revival (Theater)
97	1860	Homestead/Greek Revival Mill cottage
100-106	1910	Colonial Revival Commercial

108-112	1910	Colonial Revival Commercial
120-128	1900	Polychromatic Eclectic

Union Street

Street Number	Year Built	Building Type
23	1933	Neo-Classical, post office
33-35	1920	20th Century Commercial
39-41	1900	Neo-Classical Commercial
44	1850	Italianate, residence
45-47	1920	20th Century Commercial
49-53	1916	20th Century Commercial
Union/School	1884	Italianate Commercial
57-61	1910	20th Century Commercial
84	1886,1929	Romanesque, Victorian fire house
117	1850	Greek Revival, residence
119	1847	Federal/Italianate Industrial, Mill building
120	1855	Italianate, office building

Cost of Burying Electricity Service to Easthampton Customers

Project A: Intersection of Nashawannuck Pond Area

Cost: $531,250
Annual Revenue from utility use fees: $10,430,000.
Annual Revenue from 2% surcharge: $ 208,600 Or $17,384 monthly
Number of months to pay for project: 30 – 2.5 years
Distribution of Cost per customer groups:

Category	Number of Customers	Current Ann. Revenue	Annual Bill (avg.)	Annual 2% Increase	30 mo. Increase	Weekly Cost
Residential A (heats with elec.)	1398	1,660,000	1188	23.76	59.40	0.46
Residential B	5452	3,630,000	666	13.32	33.30	0.27
Commercial	433	1,880,000				
Easthampton**	1	600,000				
All Other comm.	432	1,280,000	2962.96	59.26	148.15	1.14
Industrial	31	3,260,000	105,161	2,103.23	5,258.06	40.45

Project B: Nashawannuck Pond Intersection and Union Street

Cost: $2,361,250
Annual Revenue from utility use fees: $10,430,000.
Annual Revenue from 2% surcharge: $ 208,600 Or $17,384 monthly
Number of months to pay for project: 136 months - 11.3 years

**The cost of the city's electrical use is shared by each taxpayer.
The utilities project would add another $12,000/year to the budget.

The annual cost of paying for burying utilities is **fixed** at 2%. The larger the project area, the longer the period of time it takes to pay back.

NOTE: Western Mass Electric provided financial data for this analysis. The cost of Project B was calculated by adding the cost of the intersection to the cost of Union Street calculated in 1991 and adjusted by the company's projected rate of inflation.

Funding Sources

Historical Funding

Title: **Heritage Property Investors**
Entity: National Trust for Historic Preservation
Description: Provides developers of historic rehab tax credits projects and historic low-income housing tax credit projects with access to corporate equity investors. Also provides access to construction and permanent lending sources, and provides technical assistance with preservation tax credit applications
Awards: Range from $500 to $150,000
Timing: Rolling
Contact: Elaine Sinburg 617.523.0885
Senior Community Development Specialist
7 Faneuil Hall Market Place - 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02109
Web Site: http://www.nthp.org/main/frontline/departments/financial.htm

Title: **Heritage Tree Grants**
Entity: Department of Environmental Management
Description: Reimburses costs associated with care (fertilization, pruning, fencing, preservation, etc.) of large or historic trees on public land (an exception for private property if the property is an identified historic site or is accessible to the public). Tree maintenance directly affects downtown revitalization through aesthetic, economic, and public safety benefits.
Awards: Maximum $5000 and must be matched
Timing: Rolling
Contact: Rob Goldman 617.727.3180 x 657
100 Cambridge St - 19th Floor
Boston, MA 02202
Web Site: http://www.state.ma.us/dem/grants.htm

Title: **Historic Landscape Preservation Grant**
Entity: Department of Environmental Management
Description: Supports restoration and preservation of historic landscapes listed in, or, in certain instances, eligible for listing on State or National Register of Historic Places.
Awards:
Timing:
Contact: Kate Lacy 617.727.3160 x 519
100 Cambridge Street – 19th Floor
Boston, MA 02202
Web Site: http://www.state.ma.us/dem/grants.htm

Title: **Historic Preservation Certification**
Entity: Massachusetts Historical Commission
Description: Provides a 20% federal income tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation of income-producing properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. All rehabilitation work must meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. A 10% tax credit exists for the rehabilitation of non-historic buildings.
Awards: 20% Federal Income Tax Credit
Timing:
Contact: Ana Latfield 617.727.8470 x 378
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
Web Site: http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/sec/mhchpp/tsdhpp.htm

Title: **National Preservation Loan Fund**
Entity: National Trust for Historical Preservation
Description: Provides market rate loans to assist non-profit organizations and public agencies to preserve properties listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Funds may be used for the creation of expansion of local preservation revolving loan funds, site acquisitions, and rehabilitation work. Specific funding priorities are established early.
Awards: Maximum of $150,000
Timing: Rolling
Contact: National Trust for Historical Preservation 617.523.0885
7 Fanueil Hall Market Place-4th Floor
Boston, MA 02109
Web Site: http://www.nthp.org/main/frontline/departments/financial.htm

Title: **Preservation Planning**
Entity: Massachusetts Historical Commission
Description: Provides technical assistance on a wide range of topics related to historic preservation. Areas of interest include: historic resources inventories, nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, development of preservation plans, local historic districts, and creation of design guidelines.
Awards:
Timing: Rolling
Contact: Chris Skelly 617.727.8470
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
Web Site: http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/sec/mhc/mhchpp/

Title: **Preservation Projects Fund**
Entity: Massachusetts Historical Commission
Description: Provides funding for the acquisition, preservation, and rehabilitation of historic places, landscapes and sites. Eligible properties must be listed in or be eligible in State Register of Historic Places and be in municipal or private non-profit ownership. Predevelopment projects such as feasibility studies, plans and specifications, and historic structures reports are also feasible.
Awards: 50% matching grant program
Timing: Annually
Contact: Elsa Fitzgerald 617.727.8470
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
Web Site: http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/sec/mhc/mhchpp/

Title: **Survey and Planning Grants**
Entity: Massachusetts Historical Commission
Description: Provides matching grants for preservation planning projects. Eligible activities include: historic resources surveys, nominations to National Register, and comprehensive historic preservation plans.
Awards: 50% Matching, size of grant depends on the historic structure
Timing: Annually
Contact: Elsa Fitzgerald 617.727.8470
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
Web Site: http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/sec/mhc/mhchpp/

Environmental Funding

Title: **General Grants Program**
Entity: Massachusetts Environmental Trust
Description: Downtown applications include: public education, advocacy, research, and community action to restore or protect water resources
Awards: $5,000 to $20,000
Timing: Variable schedule
Contact: Robbin Peach 617.727.0249
33 Union St. – 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02108
Web Site: http://www.agmconnect.org/maenvtr1.html

Title: **Lake and Pond Grant Program**
Entity: Department of Environmental Management
Description: Funds the protection, preservation, enhancement, and public access of lakes and ponds which may be located in downtown areas.
Awards: Maximum grant of $10,000 on a 50/50 cost sharing basis
Timing: Annually
Contact: Steve Ansen 617.727.3267
100 Cambridge St – 19th Floor
Boston, MA 02202
Web Site: http://www.state.ma.us/dem/grants.htm

Title: **Mass ReLeaf Grant Program**
Entity: Department of Environmental Management
Description: Funds the purchase of trees for planting in downtown area (public land). Labor must be covered by community or volunteers.
Awards: Maximum of $5,000 and must be matched
Timing: Rolling
Contact: Edith Makra 617.727.3180 x 579
100 Cambridge St – 19th Floor
Boston, MA 02202
Web Site: http://www.state.ma.us/dem/grants.htm

Title: **Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution**
Entity: Department of Environmental Protection
Description: Downtown projects which include the control of pollution from nonpoint sources, including road runoff, are eligible. Projects may include engineering practices or educational activities. Encourage high-end awards.
Awards: $20,000 to $160,000, with 40% match required
Timing: Annually
Contact: Beth McCann 617.292.5901
1 Winter Street
Boston, MA 02108
Web Site:

Title: **State Revolving Loan Fund**
Entity: Department of Environmental Protection
Description: Assists cities, towns, and wastewater districts in the financing of water pollution abatement projects, including nonpoint source projects.
Awards: Subsidized loan with current subsidy equivalent to a 50% grant (approximates a 0% interest rate)
Timing: Rolling
Contact: Eileen Dranetz 617.574.6835
1 Winter Street
Boston, MA 02108
Web Site: http://www.state.ma.us/dep/brp/mf/srf.htm

Title: **Urban Self-Help Program**
Entity: Division of Conservation Services, EOEA
Description: Reimburses costs of purchasing park land and/or constructing or rehabilitating active recreation facilities.
Awards: $500,000 for cities or towns larger than 35,000
$50,000 for small towns (Regional projects for small towns can be awarded $500,000
Timing: Annual
Contact: Joan Robes 617.727.1552 x 1014
100 Cambridge St – 14th Floor
Boston, MA 02202
Web Site:

Direct Downtown Funding

Title: **Community Development Action Grants(CDAG)**
Entity: Department of Housing & Community Development
Description: Funds economic development projects on publicly owned or managed Property including work on buildings or other street structures, facades, streets, roadways, thoroughfares, sidewalks, rail spurs, utility distribution systems, water and sewer lines, parks, playgrounds; site preparations and improvements, including demolition of existing structures; relocation assistance; other revitalizations of the area in which the projects is located. Priority is given to the projects that provide substantial employment or other direct benefit for low-income persons, significantly improve the condition of low-income neighborhood, or provide reinforcement of other housing or community development related investments by the Commonwealth.
Awards: Up to $ 1,000,000 for use over 18 months
Timing: Rolling
Contact: Deidre Walsh 617.727.7001 x 456
100 Cambridge St.- Room 1803

Boston, MA 02202
Web Site: http://www.state.ma.us/dhcd/

Title: **Local Technical Assistance**
Entity: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development
Description: Awards grants to communities or CDC's for solving specific development problems. Downtown related examples include: rehabilitation of distressed commercial districts, technical or market feasibility studies, technical analysis of potential economic development projects, tourism development, minority enterprise, and skill training. Funds pay for consultants only.
Awards: Average FY98 Grant – $26,600
Timing: Annual
Contact: John Kuzma 215.597.8797
Curtis Center, Independence Square West, Suite 140
South Philadelphia, PA 19106
Web Site: http://www.doc.gov/eda/html/locltech.htm

Title: **Community Development Fund**
Entity: Department of Housing & Community Development
Description: As part of CDBG money, provides funding for physical improvements to downtowns. Limited to communities with an existing long-term downtown plan and an existing downtown organization, subject to approval by DHCD. Must satisfy a national objective.
Awards:
Timing:
Contact: Bob Shumeyko 617.727.7001 x435
100 Cambridge St.- Room 1803
Boston, MA 02202
Web Site: http://www.state.ma.us/dhcd/

Title: **Planning For Growth**
Entity: Executive Office of Environmental Affairs
Description: Funds the development for comprehensive growth plans for cities and towns, and the development of regional plans. Projects must incorporate environmental planning with economic development
Awards:
Timing:
Contact: Kurt Gertner 617.727.9800 x 223
100 Cambridge St. – 19th Floor
Boston, MA 02202
Web Site:

Transportation Funding

Title: **Public Works Economic Development**
Entity: Executive Office of Transportation and Construction
Description: Funds for the design, construction, reconstruction of existing and/or newly located public access roads, streets, bridges, curbing, sidewalks, lighting systems, traffic control and service facilities, drainage systems and culverts associated with municipal economic development opportunities. Critical to winning award is demonstration of direct derived economic benefits.
Awards: Up to $1,000,000
Timing: Every 2 years
Contact: Henry Clay 617.973.7541
10 Park Place
Boston, MA 02166
Web Site:

Title: **Transportation Enhancement Program**
Entity: EOTC through Regional Planning Associations
Description: As part of TEA-21, provides funds for transportation enhancement Activities, including a number of downtown revitalization related goals: historic preservation; rehabilitation of historic transportation buildings; provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles; landscaping and other scenic beautification; and preservation of abandoned railway corridors, including conversion of use for pedestrians and bicycles. Regional Planning Agencies(RPA's) review eligibility of projects and set priority recommendations for the state.
Awards:
Timing:
Contact: Regional RPA – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Web Site: http://www.pvpc.org

References

1. Grimm, Sergei, N. Physical Urban Planning: System of General Concepts and Principal Features. Published by the School of Architecture, Syracuse University. Syracuse, New York. 1961.

2. Carr, J., and R.M. Godfrey. "Underground versus Overhead Distribution Systems." Presented at Canadian Electrical Association Engineering and operating Division Meeting, Vancouver, BC. March 29-April 2, 1992.

3. The Cecil Group, Inc. "Easthampton Center Initiative – Final Report." February 2000.

4. Town Planning for Small Communities. By: Walpole Town Planning Committee-Charles S. Bird, Jr. Prepared by National Municipal League Series. Copyright 1917.

5. "Downtown Technical Assistance Report." Town of Easthampton, Massachusetts. Prepared by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative: Department of Housing and Community Development. August 1999.

6. Northeast Utilities Companies. 1974. "Underground and Overhead Distribution." Northeast Utilities Service Co. Hartford, CT.

7. "Downtown Directions." Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. 1998-1999.

8. Williams, Frank B. A.M., LL.B. of the New York Bar. The Law of City Planning and Zoning. McGrath Publishing Company, College Park Maryland. 1969.

Project Contacts

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Martha Leavitt, Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs, Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy

Mark A. Verkennis, Community Representative, Massachusetts Department of Community Development

John Simone, Director, Connecticut Main Street USA

Eric Meyers, Edision Electric Institute, Washington, D.C.

Harry Freeman, Director of Economic Development, Windsor, CT

Remo Vito, Director of Public Works, Norfolk, Massachusetts

Elaine Finbury, Northeast Office, National Trust for Historic Preservation

Michael Gillette, First Selectman, Westwood, Massachusetts

Gary Harrington, Superintendent, Holden Municipal Light Company

Brian Bullock, Town Manager, Holden, Massachusetts

Adrienne St. John, Town Engineer, Bedford, Massachusetts

Becky Curran, Town Planner, Marblehead, Massachusetts

Robert Jolley, President, Marblehead Electric Light Company

Amir Kouzehkanani, Senior Transportation Planner, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, West Springfield, MA

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Chuck McCullagh, Business Manager, Williston Northampton School

Joe Pipczynski, Director of Dept. Public Works, Easthampton, MA

James A. Gracia, Town Engineer, DPW, Easthampton, MA

Robert Schwobe, President, Easthampton Historical Society

Tom Brown, EDIC member, Easthampton, MA

Morgan Mitchell, City Councilor, Easthampton, MA

Utility Contacts for Easthampton, MA

Electric

Provider: Western Massachusetts Electric Company
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Cable

Provider: Greater Media Cable
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